

Message Text

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PAGE 01 MOGADI 00297 280952Z

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SUBJECT: SOMALIA GIVES ARABIC SEMI-OFFICIAL STATUS

1. EMBASSY INFORMED THAT CIRCULAR REPORTEDLY ISSUED BY PRESIDENCY ON OR ABOUT FEBRUARY 17 AND DISTRIBUTED TO ALL GSDR MINISTRIES AND AGENCIES HAS DIRECTED THAT ALL GSDR STATIONERY, NAMES OF GOVERNMENT OFFICES, STREETS AND SHOPS, ETC. IN SOMALIA SHALL HENCEFORTH BEAR ARABIC AS WELL AS SOMALI LANGUAGE NAMES. CIRCULAR REPORTEDLY CALLED FOR ADULT LITERACY CLASSES TO TEACH ARABIC AS WELL AS SOMALI LANGUAGE. ARABIC NAMES NOT YET IN EVIDENCE ON GOVERNMENT BUILDING, STREETS, SHOPS, ETC.

2. SINCE FEB. 18, OFFICIAL SOMALI LANGUAGE DAILY OCTOBER STAR HAS CARRIED TWO PAGES OF NEWS AND EDITORIALS IN ARABIC DAILY. OCTOBER STAR ANNOUNCED SAME DAY THAT ARABIC SECTION WILL BE PERMANENT FEATURE OF PAPER.

3. ALTHOUGH THERE HAS BEEN NO PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT REGARDING STATUS OF ARABIC LANGUAGE, ARAB DIPLOMATS HERE TELL US SRC DECISION TO ADOPT ARABIC QTE AS A SECOND OFFICIAL LANGUAGE UNQTE
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PAGE 02 MOGADI 00297 280952Z

WAS MADE IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF SOMALIA'S

ACCESSION TO ARAB LEAGUE ON FEB. 14.

4. WE ALSO INFORMED THAT APPARENT GSDR DECISION TO GIVE GREATER PROMINENCE TO ARABIC WAS STIMULATED IN LARGE PART BY ARAB LEAGUE ASSISTANT SECRETARY GENERAL ASAD AL-ASAD, WHO VISITED SOMALIA IN EARLY FEB. ASAD REPORTEDLY TOLD SIAD THAT, WHEREAS ARABIC LANGUAGE WAS CONSPICUOUS THROUGHOUT MOGADISCIO ON EVE OF SOMALI INDEPENDENCE DAY IN 1960, ARABIC HAD ALL BUT VANISHED FROM STREETS UNDER CURRENT REGIME, WHICH WAS MEMBER OF ARAB LEAGUE. HE REPORTEDLY TOLD SIAD THAT GSDR COULD EXPECT NO RPT O SIGNIFICANT ARAB SUPPORT UNTIL STEPS TAKEN TO GIVE ARABIC MORE PROMINENCE.

5. OTHER ARAB LEAGUE MEMBERS, MOST NOTABLY LIBYA, HAVE ALSO ATTEMPTED IN PAST TO INDUCE SOMALIA ADOPT ARABIC AS OFFICIAL LANGUAGE BUT WITHOUT SUCCESS. AT TIME OF ASAD VISIT, HOWEVER SIAD HAD BECOME SUBJECT TO INCREASING CRITICISM FROM ARABS REGARDING AUTHENTICITY OF GSDR'S ARABIC AND ISLAMIC IDENTITY. HE ALSO HAS HOPES OF BRINGING NEXT ARAB LEAGUE SUMMIT TO MOGADISCIO AND ASAD'S PERSUASIVENESS MAY HAVE BEEN RELATED TO EFFECT ON ARAB CHIEFS OF STATE OF A SO-CALLED ARAB CAPITAL LACKING ARABIC CHARACTERS.

6. TOKEN MEASURES REPORTEDLY TAKEN TO DATE, INCLUDING ARABIC NAME CHANGES CALLED FOR IN CIRCULAR AND ARABIC LANGUAGE SECTION IN OFFICIAL NEWSPAPER, DO NOT RPT NOT MAKE ARABIC AN OFFICIAL LANGUAGE BUT SOME ARAB DIPLOMATIS NEVERTHELESS OPTIMISTIC FOR FUTURE. MORE CONSERVATIVE ARAB SKEPTICS HOWEVER VIEW IT AS COSMETIC WHICH HAS LITTLE MEANING IN RELATION TO THOSE DEEPER CHANGES THEIR CAPITALS REQUIRE AS EVIDENCE THAT SIAD'S SOMALIA TRULY BELONGS TO ARAB COMMUNITY.
HAMRICK

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